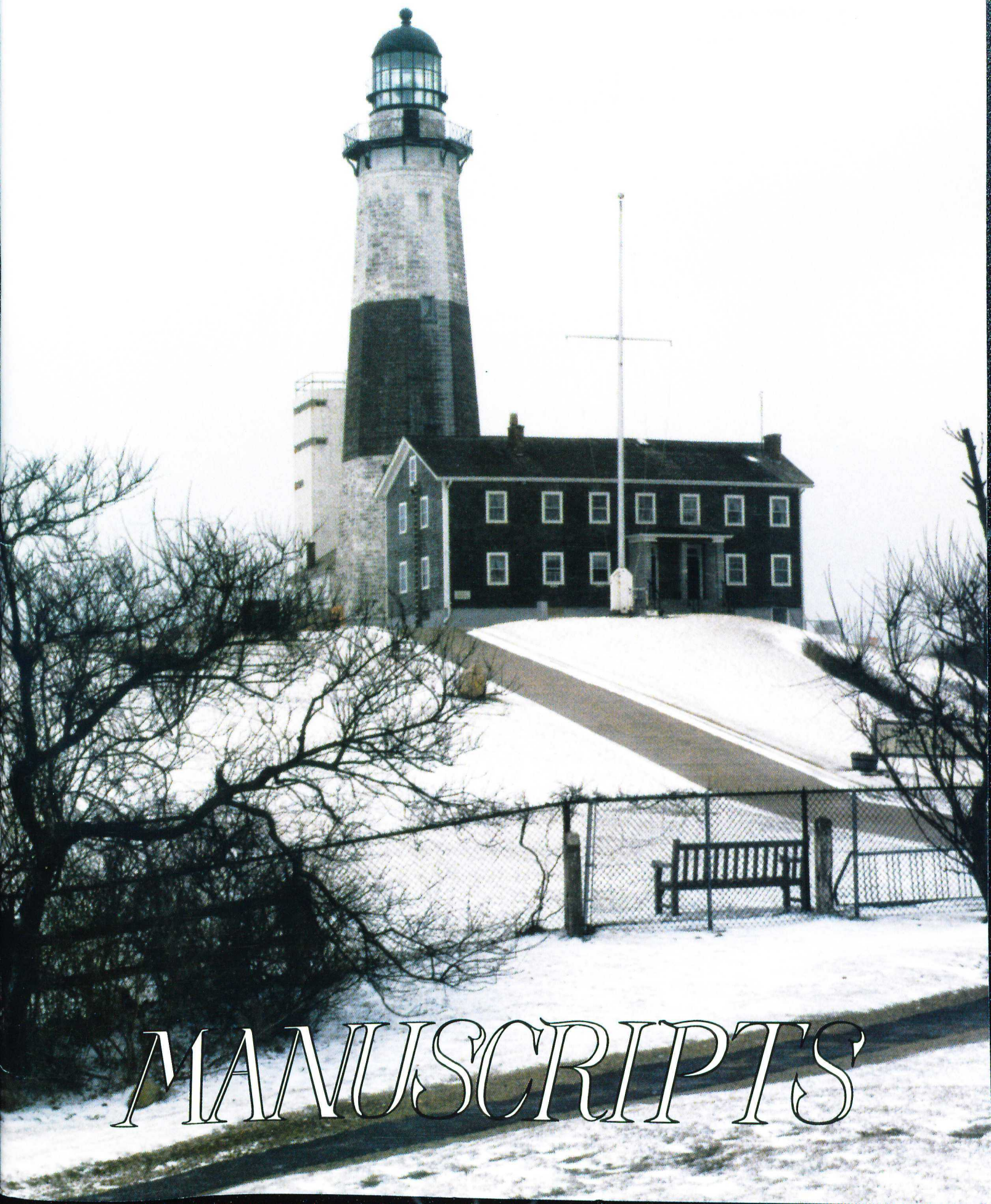


SPRING 1999



MANUSCRIPTS

Manuscripts

*He threw his coat on the window seat to
discourage company, stuck his long legs out
diagonally, and put on his metaphor glasses
and looked out the window.*

—Maxine Hong Kingston

Butler University
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Manuscripts Staff

Senior Editor

Christina Smith*

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Aaron Black

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Visual Art by:
 Aaron Black
 Christina Smith

Cover Art by Christina Smith

cicada shells

you are not jumping, I said
you are carefully considering
the water temperature
from atop the diving board

you are glancing at blurred
shiny faces nearly indistinguishable
you are not plunging in as promised
because the water is too murky
the faces too bright and dark
and the eyes too fixed on a
naked you

you are not jumping
no matter what words were
exchanged at full sun
they do not weather
crisp autumn goodbyes
that hang on the trees
dead cicada shells
deceptively empty and lifeless

you are not thinking of jumping off
that diving board anymore
you are clinging to it
on hands and knees
scrabbling at the slippery surface
you are drunk and desperate
you are trying to look dignified

you are not fooling anyone
the only way off is to
give up your shell and fall

-Jenny Kokai

My, my, sweet hardware act...
(on learning to fall for the first time)

I am poised
15 stories
with nothing but this thin line
between
myself and the canvas.

I close my eyes
hoping
my red blood stays that way
in the fall, in my veins

But when the cable
lapses into its proper motion
and the safety gear flares
out with wind

I see god flying up
at me.
I think he's smiling
like a slow moving freight train.

I saw God,
man.
I saw god,
and I learned in that instant why
his people were afraid.

A burning bush would have been easier
than Earth flying up at 63mph towards
my face,
than the condemnation of my misguided
attempts to help her,
than the need to rip the straps
off
and let her catch me.

Let god paint me across her chest,
concrete and cold and to me distant
because I am more attached to this vest
and line
than I am to her.

-Aaron Black



Motion Sickness

Dust flooded the midnight air
 as we raced the battered station wagon
 down that gravel country road.
 The pair of faint headlights flashed a yellow light
 upon rows and rows of corn
 as the radio, spinning "Dancing Days"
 and eliminating the fragile reticence of a country night,
 became a fizzle of confused dreams
 and slowly absorbed itself back into the dashboard.

The three of us laughed as the rusted door
 opened itself to the lurking darkness-
 Three lucky explorers to prowl the desolate road
 and one determinist with the short end of a straw
 left in the driver's seat to stabilize our play.
 Barefoot and tank-topped, we climbed onto the roof
 listening to the metal weaken to our weight,
 and depress to the footprints of our warranty.

The tires began to spin at a speed that felt faster than light
 and the black sky came alive
 as the stars began to dance at the sight of this emancipation.
 The summer's wind, while creating turmoil in our long meshed hair,
 uprooted any pretense and swelled all pre-existing voids.
 And our outstretched arms embraced the rejuvenation
 that this one simple act offered.

Suddenly the roof of a station wagon had become the height of happiness,
 a place to surf for insight in a tainted world.

Gravity loosened its chains
 and the three of us balanced our six feet
 on a rolling testimony to never forget
 the piece of time that was made into
 a spontaneous torrent of freedom.

-Erin Kelly

Red Lip Stick Figures

Rushing, jittery, little girls skitter into the sanctuary
 relish the three hundred seconds of freedom,
 before the next thirty three hundred seconds of nightmarish
 imprisonment
 Hurriedly enter the cramped, tiled refuge
 lined up like soldiers, packed in like sardines,
 anxious teenage souls await the next open stall
 Giggly, gossipy, lemon-headed waif apply midday masks
 and groom beloved manes
 Success-oriented scholars impatiently stand
 near grimy, white, porcelain oases, trimmed in rust
 Red-lipped, strutting, hip-hop chicks tug at massive denim trousers,
 cuddle with Marlboros in the handicap cubicle
 Sweet, young thins cackle and conform
 to the laws of this unfriendly land
 Scowling, pierced rebels shove sweet, dainty sugar and spice aside
 to be first in the conga line
 While alien life forms huddle around the overflowing trash can
 ponder life meaning and hair dyes
 Pungent clouds of perfume, acrid human odors, and adolescent attitudes
 linger and coat sterile steel walls and precious, chipping mirrors
 hang heavy in the stuffy, oppressive air
 behind the door with the skirted stick figure

-Amy Vaerwewyck

slight of hand
 lashed inside
 being without the quintessential charms
 others have

just naked glimpses of a self
 and then joy in sorrow's truckbed
 but no one
 to share with

had some friends known it all
 maybe
 had they wanted to

-Kimberly Campanello

It was sad to see them walk by
Mostly one by one, some in pairs
So caught up in their speck
that they missed it all together.

A turn of the head would have been enough.
They would have to stop then,
they wouldn't be able to help themselves
Unless they were devoid of any appreciation
for beauty in this world.

I felt an aching when my path led me away
I wanted so badly to turn and just
stare,
to stand still
specks walking by
and look with such purpose
so that I might keep it in my mind.
Knowing with sadness
that I cannot share with others what I have seen

Perhaps if I could paint
others might know what I felt
but, even so

A painting does not make one confident in the existence of God.
One does not gain assurance of life's purpose
from a painting of a sunrise.
It seems merely an excuse to rid the pallet
of red and blue pigments.

When the pallet belongs to a bigger hand
And we become part of the picture
how can we,
tiny specks,
keep walking,
never feeling that we are one with the sky?

-Jessica Hatfield

Sitting in the Middle

The sparrows and blackbirds are playing
in puddles--small streams of water trickling
down their shiny heads and backs. They twist and flap
before rising in overcast glory to the gray clouds above.
Dipping, Diving, Careening
breathless flight with such certainty and skill.
They know distances. They know angles.
Swooping perfectly through gnarled branches,
around water-beaded cars, around park benches,
around me. They fly like music through the air
black notes bobbing up and down on a cloud gray page.

But I never learned how to read such beautiful music.

-Christina Smith



First Off

We were with nature
climbing through the river's embankments, barefoot after the mud ate off our shoes, toes gripping
the slippery mud slopes with determination and careful, forgiving steps. It was easier to walk
outside of the river than canoe down it, the river had lost her water, and we were on a search to
find it.

the loons stared at us
disguised in the shrubs, we knew they were there but pretended we didn't, they appreciate that
game (the pretending makes them feel safe, yet not forgotten). Our last streams of water dripping
down our wrists as we carried the canoe above our heads, we were still strong after the first hour.

Do you remember feeling that strong?
The map in our pockets was damp and tearing, it didn't matter, it was too aged and tired to help
the Wisconsin river had moved around a bit in the past forty years, I suppose we all get restless.

How tragic-
Stasis left unbroken.
remember, you gave up before I did, on the third or fourth hour you began looking for planes,
listening for the rush of highways. You gave up on the Eagle, not believing him when he soared
overhead, circling to follow our rhythm, staying close to direct us home. We found the river just
before dark, how disappointing it was, her ugly wide mouth smacking her lips,

civilization, dirty skies
We paddled looking no where, watching our strokes cut through her thick saliva. We paddled
lonely for color, bleached out from our concluded hunt. And we paddled till we hit the bank, and
thought silently as our bare legs waded through rocky water.

Action resumed.

-Allegra Mather

Fantasy

She sat on the wooden stool
with a face sculpted by fragments
of a Picasso painting.
Something had weathered her smile
a smile that only allowed
a breath of her starvation to escape.

Her lips were painted and her eyes charcoaled
Her cheeks were pure in a whiteness of fidelity.
The curly red strands of hair set fire
to the underlying sparks of intellect.
The collar of her wrinkled white blouse
choked the elegance of her long neck,
stifling her desire to be unadorned.

Her toenails poked through holes
on the tops of her lavishly worn blue hightops.
But despite her testimony for an unquenchable burst of freedom
the audience embraced her music.
All conversations of plight and righteousness ceased
and the smoke hung shallow in the dim lights
while the strum of her guitar filtered a
mischievous cascade to a humbled crowd.

She was satisfied, she was real, she was finally honest.

She strummed a peace that was deeper than sleep
and put her detrimental grace in motion.
Her fingers talked louder than her blue shoes
and even more than the single tear that escaped
into a wet reality of cathartic grief.

And her words of deviant solitude
Transcended her aura of loneliness
And left even the monolithic geologists
with the feeling that
some things are meant to remain fantasy.

-Erin Kelly

Asleep to the World

through dreams of wind and rain
she learns the night
the color of pain and the sound
of a smile.
then, breaking the crust of sleep,
they are gone.

-Sara McFall

tea

she is steeping in her anger
like an old tea bag
the water swirling darker
and darker brown around her
rings are being left on the mug

she is walking to the corner bakery
where fresh bread and coffee
are made every minute
but she asks for day old
french bread, and tears it
with teeth like fangs

she is passing your house
as she does on occasion
on the way home
staring up at the window you share
and wishing that it would
shatter inward, that she could
make the glass
slice you to pieces

she is going home to wait
to sit and steep and mold
until her anger solidifies
into a disgusting congealed whole

she is staying there
because you made her the tea bag
and you poured her the water
and you asked her to wait for you,
as you left for a minute
and you never came back

-Jenny Kokai

The Meaningless Encounter

The crow caws incessantly in the leafless oak beside the barn. I think he is scolding me for sitting in the shade of the run-down building when the sun has generously shed its shyness and graced the earth with a rare appearance in January. His discordant voice screams down to me and I glare into the naked branches where his shiny black body shimmers as if sheathed in oil. I stand up and he quiets for a moment regarding me curiously with beady black eyes that I cannot see but I can feel pricking my skin. Taking a step toward him, I see he gets nervous and screeches louder with a flutter of his wing feathers. He knows that if I continue toward him, I could reach up and pluck an inky feather from his tail. I take another step. The proximity greatly disturbs him and in a swoop of feathers brushing the barren branches, he rises higher into the sunlight. Chiding me from the air, he circles my head. I jump at him and scream with a quivering voice. Damn bird, don't you sass me. Wish I had my .22. The sunlight is perfect this morning to catch the glimmer of each of his feathers as they dart away from his form and calm themselves as they buoy to the pasture below.

-Christina Smith

Bob's Beef Jerky
for Brie

(The stage lights come up on a woman chained to a vending machine with the large caption "Bob's Beef Jerky". She is holding note cards. A large padlock is draped across her chest.)

Giri

Today is the day I change the world. No longer am I willing to settle with just a vegetarian poster on my wall, eating healthy myself, or telling my friends. I'm going to tell everyone in the whole world! We're going to make everyone vegetarians! (Laughs maniacally) I'm going to stand here until the news comes, and the papers come, and I can convince America that I am right, and they are wrong.

(A man enters rifling through his pockets for change. He looks up and notices Giri blocking the change slot.)

Eric

Excuse me, but you've chained yourself to my future lunch. Could you move a little to the right so I can get the jerky out and then I'll be on my way and you can stay there.

Giri

(whips out a notecard) ehh-hem. Number three, for the hurried business executive who doesn't think he has time to become a vegetarian.

Eric

Excuse me?

Giri

You...

Eric

Me?

Giri

Yeah, you. The hurried business exec. who doesn't think he has time to become a vegetarian.

Eric

Who's talking about becoming a vegetarian? All I wanted was some beef jerky for lunch and now I'm going to be late for my meeting because you've chained yourself to the machine.

Giri

See, you've proven my point. Ok, business, I can do business too. I'll cut you a deal, you stay long enough for me to tell you why you should become a vegetarian, and I'll maybe get out of your way so that you can have some beef jerky.

Eric

You'll maybe get out of my way??!?!? I'll counter offer, I listen to your spiel, and you must get out of my way.

Giri

(hurriedly) We'll see. Ok, now, here are the reasons you should become a vegetarian. As you know, you are a hurried business executive with very little time. (She smiles knowingly at Eric) And since you have little time, you think that eating out of vending machines such as this one. (She gestures to the machine) is the only way to go. Guess again! An exciting alternative to this is Vegetarianism! Modern vegetarianism comes in many forms, first there are the vegans, who eat only....

Eric

(Cuts in) OK, OK, now how about the beef jerky?

Giri

I haven't finished yet!!! The deal was the whole speech for some beef jerky (under her breath maybe).

Eric

What did you say? Forget it, I'll go to the restaurant next door and treat myself to some Veal Parmesan.?

Giri

How could you possibly think of eating veal??

Eric

OK, no beef jerky, although I don't know why. WHY can't I eat veal?

Giri

Baby cows, separated from their mother at birth, fed a milk mixture that causes them to die at three weeks old, and while they're alive, they live in pens too small to move around in. never cleaned out. They get diseases, they suffer, they die, you eat them. Do you see anything wrong with this? Do YOU? I DO!!! DO YOU?!?!?

Eric

But the cows are put on earth to be eaten!!!

Giri

They're what???? Are you NUTS???

Eric

Look, If cows were not made to be eaten, why would god have made them?

Giri

If you weren't made to be eaten why would god have made you?

Eric

You're psycho, I'm calling the cops.

Giri

Wait! You promised!! You said if you listened to my speech I would give you some beef jerky. And you haven't listened to my speech, so I'm not giving you any beef jerky.

Eric

I said I would go to the restaurant and eat something else!

(Enter a newswoman with a camera. She is busy adjusting her hair and checking a hand mirror for her makeup. She looks bored and begins setting up the camera)

Maria

Here we are live at the scene of a sit-in in process. This woman, (Holds microphone up to Giri's face)

Giri

Giri Thomas. (Pulls out a note card) And I'm here today to tell everyone about the miracles of Vegetarianism. Vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is not just for the hippies and beatniks people have thought it was at first...

Maria

This woman, Giri Thomas, a rabid vegetarian, is holding this man here hostage. The suspect has chained herself to the Bob's Bee Jerky machine, and refuses to be unchained. More updates in a while from WSAM News. We're there when the news is happening.

Giri

I'm not holding him hostage!!!

Maria

You're hanging onto his tie and you won't let him go. What do YOU call that?

Giri

I said I'd let him go if he'd just listen to my reasons for why he should become vegetarian! And now for you the modern woman who puts in a full day at the office, then goes home and cooks Note card #8.

Eric

Could you get her off of me? I can't breathe!

Giri

If you'll just turn that camera on for a moment (looks at note card) and let me tell the world about the wonderful, healthful, cruelty free lifestyle that is vegetarianism! Then I'll let this man go. That's why I called you and told you that a woman was chaining herself to beef jerky machine in the basement of this building. So I could spread the message! That's why you came!!

Maria

It was a slow news day.

Giri

Don't say that! You don't mean that! You came to hear the WORD!

Maria

(to Eric) And you are?

Eric

Eric...

Maria

(Turns the camera back on) This is Maria Scott reporting back from the hostage scene. The terrorist has made her demands and the SWAT team is now attempting to argue with her. The suspect still holds a man, believed to be named Eric, at gunpoint. We'll be back with more news from the scene in just a moment.

Giri

That's not TRUE! You can't say that! I don't have him at gunpoint! If he wanted to leave he could have just wrenched away from me! I'm chained to a machine! And there are no police here! I don't believe in guns! I'm anti-gun! I'm a pacifist! That's why I DON'T EAT ANIMALS! Don't you understand? Now all those people out there watching the news think that I'm some sort of awful insane woman! They won't listen to reasonable arguments from a woman they believe to be insane! It's all lost, all of it! I might as well go home! You've killed all my hopes, my plans, everything! How can you do something like that?

Maria

I told you! It was a slow news day! I just took the truth and embellished it a little!

Nobody wants to hear about a story about a peaceful fanatic! You have to make it (Reverently) NEWSWORTHY!! I mean, do you really think the public would tune in every night if all the news had were people like you? We're competing against Hollywood! We don't have big stars, or gorgeous models, or the money! So we have to have PLOT!

Eric

Wait a minute! Now I thought she was nuts (gestures to Giri) but you're even nuttier!
Aren't there laws against that?

Maria

Oh! Like anyone will care! The public doesn't want the boring old truth anymore! It
wants drama, excitement, adventure!

Eric

Who are you to decide what the public wants?

Maria

WE have DEMOGRAPHICS! WE know what the public wants! Do you have
DEMOGRPHICS??

Eric

I am a demographic!!

Giri

Wait! Listen! I came here to tell the world about vegetarianism! Now YOU have
destroyed my reputation! And YOU still don't want to become a vegetarian! What am I
going to do? They'll send me to prison! I'll be locked up! Behind bars! Away from my
animals! And who will protect them? Someone like you will come along, claim their sole
purpose for existence is to feed you, and eat them!

And then, someone like you will come along and film their bloody carcasses for the six
o'clock news! I won't let you! You can't!

Maria

Sure I can! I am THE NEWS!

Eric

That doesn't mean you can get away with just anything! You're supposed to give the public
the truth!

Maria

Why won't you listen to me? I told you! The public doesn't WANT the truth!

Giri

No kidding! I keep trying to tell people what meat does to their hearts! And do they listen
to me? No, of course not! "Leave us alone Giri! We just want to enjoy our steaks!" "Be
quiet Giri! We need that protein!" The average human being gets three times the protein
he needs a day! And along with all that extra protein is fat, and the fat causes heart disease
and osteoporosis, and then they die! Heart disease is one of the leading killers in America
today! And it's things like beef jerky that cause a lot of it! Why don't you put that on your
TV tabloid show you call news?

Eric

Are you serious? Meat causes heart disease? My grandfather died from a heart attack!

Giri

That's all the more reason why you should take steps to see that you never have a heart attack. If it runs in your family, then you have a great chance!

Eric

But what do I eat instead of meat? I mean, that is one major food group!

Giri

(begins to unchain herself from the machine) Well... there are lots of things that you could eat. For instance...

Maria

Wait a minute! If you're not chained up, how am I going to convince America that you're insane? And if you really start listening to her, then how am I going to say that she's holding you hostage? You'll wreck my story! Can't you please chain yourself back to that machine? Come on, I'll buy everyone beef jerky on WSAM! I have an expense account! Just please chain yourself back to the machine? Pretty please? Pretty please with a cherry on top?

Giri

I don't want any beef jerky! What part of vegetarianism don't you get?

Eric

So if I eat beef jerky I could die!?

Giri

Exactly!

Maria

So you're not going to chain yourself back to the machine?

Giri

There's no need to. I've given Eric my strongest arguments for not eating the beef jerky, and so if he wants to go ahead and kill himself, then fine!

Eric

(Realization slowly dawning) Wait! You're saying that if I eat this beef jerky I'll die. This minute? But I've eaten meat before and I'm still alive!

Maria

Yeah, and I eat meat all the time and my doctor says I'm as fit as a fiddle!

Giri

OK, Ok. So you won't die today, or tomorrow, but eventually your arteries will begin to shrink, you can almost hear them! "Stop Eric! Don't shrink us! We should stay big and healthy and allow blood to pass easily through us!" And eventually, your tiny pitiful arteries will give out, and that meat, over all the years will have killed you. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not for you. But with your family history of heart disease.... well....

Eric

Ohmigod! I'm gonna' die!

Maria

Get a grip. You aren't going to die. She's misleading you.

Giri

Oh, like you're one to talk!

Eric

I'm not going to die?

Maria

Trust me, you're not going to die.

Giri

How can you trust her? She said I was holding you at gunpoint.

Maria

Yeah, but that was for work. I'm really a very honest person.

Eric

If you'll lie for work you're not an honest person. And if you go around telling everyone that they're going to die today if they touch a hamburger, then you're not honest either.

Maria+Giri

But I was dishonest for a purpose!

Giri

If I don't give drastics, people won't listen!

Maria

Hey, the same for me!

Giri

Wait, I'm the same as you? I don't think so! I tell the people what could happen.

Maria

Are you saying that people don't hold others hostage at gunpoint? That could happen too!

Giri

I'm so confused. All I wanted to do was convince everyone that eating meat is bad.

Maria

(fakely) And all I wanted to do was tell everyone that taking hostages was bad.

Eric

You what?! Come on.

Maria

(Sullenly) OK, OK, so all I wanted was a story. But nobody ever would've known the difference.

Eric

That's not the point.

Giri

Yeah, the news is supposed to give the people the truth!

Maria

So if we'd put your story on, with you telling everyone what you told Eric, would that have been any better?

Giri

So we're both wrong?

Maria

Well, technically, but I always look at it as... hey! Have you ever considered being a TV newsperson? There are many openings for people with your talents.

Giri

I don't think I'd like to consider "embellishing the truth" as one of my talents.

Eric

If you're both wrong, that leaves Me to be right. So I think I'll have that beef jerky now.

Giri

After everything that I've told you?

Eric

Yeah, but how much of that was truth? I mean, meat's harmless right? You were just, umm.. Embellishing.

Giri

Except for the part about dying today I wasn't! Everything else I said was true, 100 percent.

Eric

They really treat cows that way?

Giri

Yeah, sad isn't it?

Maria

What way?

Eric

Giri says that they lock little cows up in dirty pens and starve them to make Veal Parmesan!

Maria

Hey! I bet I could get a story out of that! A big expose. I can see it now. (Switches to Newswoman voice). This is Maria Scott on the scene of one of man's greatest inhumanities, what do you call that?

Giri

Factory farming.

Maria

Factory farming. (Reverts to normal voice) And you could come along as my resident animal rights expert!

Giri

So I could really get the message to everyone?

Maria

Everyone who watches WSAM!

Giri

But you'd have to promise to be truthful. Only the truth. No embellishing.

Maria

I'd try. And if people really treat cows like that, why then the truth would be big and bloody enough! (Giri grimaces)

Giri

OK, here's how...

(The two exit chattering excitedly about their story. Eric is left alone with the beef jerky machine. He looks at it a long moment, glances around cautiously, then hurriedly sticks his money in the machine. He takes the beef jerky and runs out of the room embarrassed to have it. Lights go down)

-Jenny Kokai



in a front yard
a spacious address full of voices glittering and voices
smashing

one soundless morning
a mother shot a father
hushed

then put the gun of quietness
to her own throat
shot herself
silence

until a son came outside
seeing his parents of soundlessness
watching their blood mingle
on the lawn

he reached into his throat
and pulled out his voice box
it screamed in pain
he set it first on his father's chest
wet with hot blood
the son was stooped over
and mute holding his father's head in his lap
watching his voice box vibrate
and howl the nonlanguage
for his father

eardrums bursting at the sound of the voice box
the son then crawled to his mother noiselessly
his mouth round and taking the crying voicebox
from his father
he placed it between his mother's dry breasts
it wept
without seeing

and how the deafmute son sees no vibration
in our throats
no voices for that soundless morning

-Kimberly Campanello

Cherry

I watch it burn.
 Flickering like a lighthouse
 Standing between my fingers
 Guiding my dark southern ship
 Catching it as I inhale deeply
 Feeling the burn
 Letting it fill my lungs
 Taking them over and freezing them
 Capturing my breath in its magic
 Eating what little I have left inside
 Let me burn.
 Suck me down deeper.
 Make me giddy with fear
 Change me on a molecular level,
 Because I have time to burn.

-Samantha Mathis

Upon the Coughing Up of my Lung

(as witnessed by two girls and a goldfish, Neitzche)

Yesterday morning I awoke
 resting listlessly upon my bedcovers,
 unmoved by the rustle of the sheets
 like some lover who has been conquered
 by the weight of her dreams for her beloved.
 yes, my lung, my beloved
 I(as witnessed by two girls and a goldfish, to find a fleshy pink lung
 Neitzche)
 ies beside me now
 wet, warm, sentient
 emancipated from her caged cavity
 my lung basks in the luminal draft
 which sifts through ethereal curtains

my lung breathes her own air.

I cradle my lung
 gently in the cup of my hands
 holding her close to my bosom
 I let a tear fall
 and watch as the tear fumbles
 down the contours of her belly.

My lung grows cold
 betrayed by that which feeds her.

Distracted, I turn towards my goldfish
 she means nothing to me now.

-Alison Beard

Impotence

In my mind I am parting the Red Sea.
 Aiming my band of pilgrims through that channel to a new birth.
 Unfortunately in life my driving force is not hard like the Pharaoh's heart.
 Instead it is like Aaron's staff, going limp and becoming a snake with no venom.
 I curse, knowing that Passover may never get the chance to spare my first born.
 And the Red Sea, my passage to freedom, to bliss
 grows bored with the wait, resealing itself.
 So I am left staring at this cold body of water
 hoping that things will be better
 in the morning

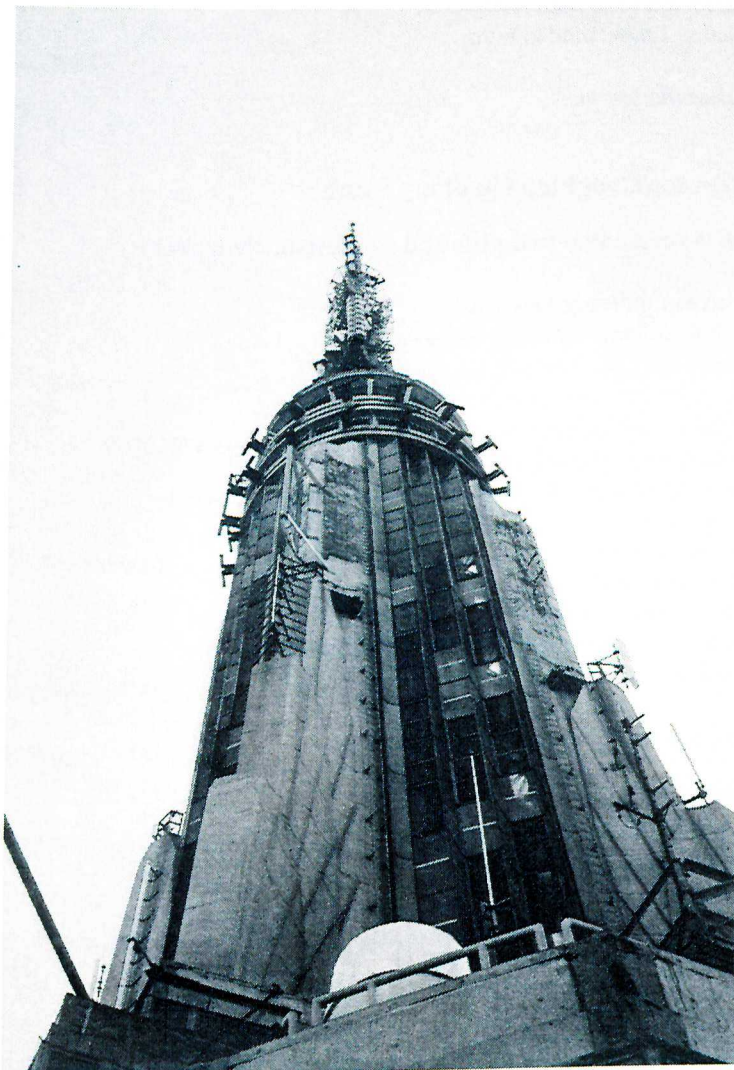
-T.V.O.W.E

Release

wind-blown tickle
 across naked hairs
 gives way to exploring
 palms on smooth skin.
 the embracing sky
 grows wet in relief
 as our lips turn flesh
 into narcotic love.

slow bodies jerk
 in soft gravity
 hands grasp hands
 as feet tingle
 at the mind
 shuddering, exploding
 from touching
 that delightful release.

-Randall Clark



For Miles Wolf

One arm
thrust out of the womb
into
this world,
emerging from blood
into blood,
with a primitive passion
known only by innocents,
your solitude disrupted by
our chaotic existence
and our hope that
you
will somehow
make the difference.

-Jane Stevens

My Messenger

Tell me why I should be here,
because I don't see it.
All our paths together
lead to a maelstrom of
fleshy gyration,
careful nurturing,
and misguided despair.

your hands are cold
and I know giving you
all the daisies in the world
can't save me now

There are no covers to hide under.
No badges, no uniforms
but the ones in our minds.
That's where
my last hope lives.
Where pain,
my muse,
is called
Malachi *
And my heart is a stake
driven through your opal eye.

-Aaron Black



*Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament in Christian Bibles. The literal Hebrew meaning of the word is "My Messenger".

Nebraska

she doesn't remember
Nebraska wind sweeping or
massive
starry nights
big
solid trees

she knows
bumpy crumbly pavement
reeking tar
orange cones
liquid heat rising

she knows
a gas station
cramped racks of
candy bars
disheveled magazines
air conditioning goosebumps
and
a telephone

metal punch of buttons
hollow distant ringing
a glass door jingles
hollow distant ringing
before
"He's Dead"
before
a blurring sea
of colors
before
warm streams
descend her face

-Katie Sillanpa



Delinquent

He didn't have a "low down-payment" option.
 No "easy monthly installments"
 Didn't have plastic;
 He doesn't *do* plastic.
 "Six months same as cash" wasn't considered.
 The "evergreen" reminds us of
 His eternal essence and
 Gift to us.

As the hum, jingle, and paper spit of electronic registers
 Satisfies the *evergreen* machine that runs us,
 The reason for the greatest sacrifice
 Is lost.
 Mesmerized by our material illusion,
 We are
 Delinquent.

-Dave Hoffman

Forgiven

God
 feels like
 moving in water
 images float
 like suspended fish
 a bed, a dresser of drawers, a door
 and He says He is
 here
 beside you
 within you
 emptying out a soul that has been
 clogged with guilt
 since you first began to please people
 smudges
 finger print lies
 blueprints for you days
 and bruises for your mind
 He breathes on the heart-chambers
 gently
 wiping away smudges
 with a gossamer touch

-Katie Sillanpa

The Harvester

The child held her mother's hand
 as they strolled down the one-one country road.
 Fat black bumblebees buzzed
 around the last wildflowers of the season
 perched just beyond the road's edge.
 The child ran to shoo the bumblebees and
 pick the flowers, but she remembered--
 that was not why she had come.
 If I pick the flowers, mother
 they will not grow back in the spring.

A dark shadow crossed ahead of them.
 It was a chicken hawk swooping on air currents
 above the honey locust trees. The girl stepped carefully
 casting her glance to the cloudless sky.
 I mustn't step on the hawk, mother.
 I might tie him to the ground.

Thick, warm air stirred
 with the afternoon breeze. Smells of the harvest
 were in the air. The golden beans waved to the child
 from their field and the drying cornstalks crackled
 back and forth.
 Daddy should remember to leave a row of crops in the field, mother.
 That makes the next harvest full.

As the road forked ahead of them,
 the bright child raced for the brush between the pathways.
 This was why she had come.
 With the precision of a wood carver
 the girl picked the bittersweet. She bent each stem
 carefully before pinching it off and cradling it in her arms.
 The bright orange marbles caught the sunlight
 filtering through the drying red and yellow leaves.
 The girl told her mother when the pods popped,
 small suns shedding fiery coats.
 When they turned to go, the child was careful
 to leave a few strands behind.
 Look mother, she said.
 I am the Harvester.

-Christina Smith

My grandmother's hands

My grandmother's hands
are not delicate.
They are red and chapped,
the tips are callused white,
and the knuckles are pregnant
with arthritis: the price of her labor.

My grandmother is a quilt-maker,
a history maker and a storyteller.
Delicate hands could not be burdened
with such responsibility.

her house is littered with pieces of history,
with stories, half told, or single squares
strewn about like characters of an epic
not yet bound.
Fat quarters she calls them,
these bits and pieces of
old baby blankets, torn shirts,
or maybe a solitary print too exceptional,
always promised to the next quilt,
the next epic.

I have spent my life
disgusted with house wives,
with weak women who didn't understand
the power of education,
the fundamental importance
of an
independent individual.
And now I look at my hands, which are
my mother's hands, which are
my grandmother's hands
and I am filled with amazement
at what I too
may be capable of.

-Jane Stevens

Sweet Georgia Pine

Walking down Doncaster Drive toward Sherwood Elementary
 Carrying the humid air on my shoulders
 I watch the dance of the Georgia pine trees
 He leans in to ask her to be his partner, and she almost refuses
 But a shift in the breeze changes her mind.
 She lets him lead, but she knows the dance by heart.
 In perfect sway with the other, they glide
 Until the wind calls them to a halt.
 Pine needles brush against each other as they separate.
 A gesture of appreciation.

-Sara McFall

Mental Draught

My ideas run dry
 like some sleepy voice
 I clear my throat and swallow hope.
 It moistens the empty sponge inside,
 as doubt threads in and out of the irregular holes
 My hair drips with uncertainty,
 even as my cheeks curve with confidence
 Vision clouded with plans,
 blurred with schedules;
 concave futures compensate for my faltering identity.
 Emotions, left untrained, fumble in the dusk of youth,
 a pickle between excitement and fear,
 dread and relief.
 I exhale a thousand tiny invisible bits
 of insanity
 or more.

-Amy Vaerwewyck

you would have to be needy
to love her
because she needs to be needed
desperately, she needs to be needed
to the point where there is no doubt
that you are fragile as a teacup
and entirely hers to break

you must crawl to love her
ducking underneath the electric
wires of her defenses
on your hands and knees
and come to her harmless
as a dog
only then will she trust you
and pat you on the head

you would have to be clingy
to love her
because she wants to dance only
by herself, wants to shake her red hair
like a whip
and the only way to join her is
to grab strands and lose
knowledge of the ground

-teo

Bloomington

Hot
humid
southern Indiana summers,
where the air is so thick
it'd take
half a day
for your hair to dry
and people give up
hanging out their clothes
in late June

During the day
the town moves more slowly
melting before your eyes,
but at night
the Women's shelter
overflows in fast forward, with
red-eyed
sweaty-haired women who
"just need somewhere to stay
for tonight."

This was my symphony,
the day-time largo
and the evening allegro
and me
waiting for the fighting to stop
hoping it would
'cause it was 95 degrees
and that's too hot
to be sharing a twin bed
with my sister.

-Jane Stevens

On Seeing Chuck Marten perform again*

I gave up my past for this shit,
sitting day after day at desks
and waiting for a diploma that will never
come.

My hands have fallen into the
slashing rhythm of a pencil on paper.
I have no more new things to say.
Stick a fork in me
I'm done.

...but there were nights two years ago
when I was up on stage
(or whatever we had that passed for a stage),
and I was alive,
not just from adrenaline but
potential.

Those nights have buried themselves alive in my mind
And now I fear I will never be there again
I will never be there again
I will never be
Never be
Never
be

And this is all the potential I have left...

-Aaron Black

*Chuck Marten is a local rock band known for their strong live performances.

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